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ABSTRACT

This teaching guide presents objectives, resources, and evaluation criteria for teaching pupils in fourth grade social studies and fine arts classes about Africa, and particularly the Akan ethnic group in Africa. This unit was developed at an interdisciplinary summer workshop for teachers on African culture. The major objective is to help students accept the reality of cultures other than their own. Specific objectives include that students will be able to identify stereotypes, learn geographic facts about Africa, recognize similarities and differences between African and American families, and learn to appreciate the culture of the Akan people. The guide describes the Akan nation, which consists of approximately five million people and accounts for approximately one-half of the population of Ghana. The Akan people speak nearly 20 distinct languages, live in rural communities, and are noted for their intricate and exquisite art forms, particularly sculpture, architecture, textiles, music, and dance. Lesson plans are presented for nine topics including debunking myths about Africa and Africans, the geography of Ghana, family and community life among the Akans, farming, and African culture. Students are involved in a variety of activities including simulating African ceremonies, playing African music, and working in various Akan art media including tie dye and Akinkra cloth. For each topic, information is presented on objectives, materials and time required, activities, and bibliography. (DB)

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"THE AKAN OF GHANA"

An Instructional Unit for Fourth Grade

by

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This teaching unit on Africa was developed as part of an interdisciplinary workshop project in African curriculum development held on the University of Illinois' Urbana-Champaign campus in the summer of 1978. The workshop project, which was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, was carried out from 1977-80 and was integrated into an on-going program of outreach services offered to teachers nationwide. For further information on teaching aids available through outreach services, contact:

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PREFACE STATEMENT

An important reason for teaching this instructional unit on Africa this school year is its role in the quest for peace and understanding. It is essential that a student develop an appreciation and understanding of himself as an individual while developing an acceptance of the reality of cultures other than his own. If all the people of the world fully understood the basic similarities between people and cultures, perhaps they would be able to live with and appreciate the differences as well.

GRADE LEVEL AND COURSE

This unit was developed for students in the fourth grade. It will be taught mainly within the Social Studies course; but the art lessons will be incorporated into the Fine Arts program.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

I. Concepts

- A. Stereotypes
- B. Variety and contrasts
- C. Social organization
- D. Continuity
- E. Cultural change
- F. Relationship of man with his environment
- G. Symbolism and Functionalism in art forms

II. Basic Skills

- A. The student will be able to identify stereotypes.
- B. The student will learn geographic facts about Africa, its climate, and vegetation.
- C. The student will recognize the similarities and the differences between an African family and his own.
- D. The student will learn how an Akan family uses the environment to meet basic human needs.
- E. The student will learn to appreciate the culture of the Akan people of Ghana.

Background Information

Ghana lies on the Gulf of Guinea near the equator between the Ivory Coast on the west and Togo on the east. The country of Ghana is about the size of the State of Oregon. The climate is tropical with relatively high temperature and humidity throughout the year. The annual rainfall is about 57 inches. Instead of winter and summer, the seasons are alternately wet and dry.

The population of Ghana is around ten million. Approximately five million of these Ghanaians belong to the Akan nation. The three largest groups of Akan people are the Asante, the Fante, and the Akwapim. About three-fourths of the people live in rural communities in Central and Southern Ghana, but there is a continuing migration toward the cities. Although English is the official language, around 100 languages and dialects are spoken in Ghana. Akan comprises as many as 17 distinct languages, although they are similar enough to allow people to communicate.

Ghana's principal exports are cocoa, tropical hardwoods, aluminum, gold, and diamonds. Thus, Ghana's economy depends mainly on agriculture and minerals. Agriculture in the forest zone is characterized by mixed cropping: cocoa, yams, plantains, cassava, maize, and a wide range of fruits. Coconut and oil-palm trees are important too, providing a variety of products for export and local use.

Family and Community Life

The Asante, which is the largest group of Akan-speaking people, live in a strong communal society. The individual learns how to cooperate and participate in village life from an early age. The Asante say that everyone is born into the world to bear a part of the burden of looking after the interest of the community.

Women have high standing among the Asante. It is through women that lineage and descent is traced. The land is passed down to the descendants on the mother's side of the family. However, this traditional system of inheritance is changing. Under the traditional system, a man's property is inherited by his sister's children, and those children are expected to work on his farm. However, many Asante men now prefer to have their property go on to their own children and they make wills to ensure that their property will go to their sons.

Family and Community Life (contd.)

Children in Asante society are highly cherished and often praised. They are all trained in some skill - girls by their mothers, and boys by their fathers. The son has traditionally followed the skill of the father (goldsmith, weaving, farming, etc.) A son going into his father's trade will serve as his apprentice while he learns the trade. Today, with the changes in Africa, many young people are leaving the rural areas and going to the cities to live, work, and go to school.

As with many African societies, oral tradition plays a role in the training and teaching of children. Since the Asante did not use a written language, all laws, customs, proverbs, and folk tales were passed down by word of mouth. While western-type education in English is to be found everywhere among the Akan today, the traditional forms of instruction as well as Islamic education continue to exist.

Generally, the Asante home life is stable, and there is a strong sense of continuity with the past.

The Arts and Symbolism

Art in Africa has always been mainly functional. It exists as a vital part of everyday life. It has been related to clothing, housing and household objects, religious and ceremonial practices, economic needs, transportation, wars and the hunt, and entertainment. Art objects have always served a purpose in African society. It is important to keep in mind that the functional art of Africa still lives.

The Akan are noted for their intricate and exquisite art forms --- sculpture, architecture, textiles, music, and dance. Kente cloth is a highly developed art form among the Asante. It is woven in long, narrow bands on hand-operated looms. These bands are then sewn together to form a rectangular piece of material. Kente cloth is the traditional dress of Ghana and is worn for special occasions.

Adinkra cloth is a cloth stamped with symbolic designs which represent the values and beliefs of the Akan in their everyday lives. It is sometimes called the "saying goodbye" cloth, because that is the meaning of the word adinkra. It is often worn for mourning, but is also worn for other special occasions.

The Asante made small brass objects to serve as counterweights for weighing gold dust or gold nuggets. Most of the weights were made by craftsmen who learned the art from their fathers and uncles. These beautifully crafted objects are considered one of the finest series of small cast objects in the history of art.

The Arts and Symbolism (contd.)

Gold is the metal most precious to the Asante. In Ghana the manner in which the gold is fashioned reaches a high degree of excellence. Each gold weight has some kind of casting which has a symbolic meaning. Symbols can express many wise sayings, such as: A bird in a trap sings a different song from a free one; and - Wisdom is not gold dust that it should be tied up and put away.

Symbolism is an essential part of Asante culture. The most sacred golden object is the golden stool which, according to tradition, is believed to have been caused to come down from the skies about 1700, by the Chief Priest of King Osei Tutu. The golden stool is the central object in the enstoolment ceremonies because it represents the strength and unity of the Asante nation.

Text of pp. 2,3 and 4 is taken from the background booklet for The Ashanti of Ghana: A Heritage of Gold, a media kit produced by Current Affairs Films - Division of Key Productions, Inc., 346 Ethan Allen Highway, Ridgefield, Connecticut 06877.

DEBUNKING THE MYTHS ABOUT AFRICA AND AFRICANS

General Objective:

The student will identify and examine his perceptions of Africa and Africans and will examine the sources of his impressions.

Specific Objectives:

1. The student will state his own impressions of Africa and Africans in a word association pre-test.
2. The teacher will assess the students' perceptions of Africa.

Materials:

Flash cards of a few well-known words from the association exercise.

Interest Approach:

1. Make some flash cards with such words as "food", "TV", "friend", and "game" on them. Tell the class that you want them to tell you the first word that comes to their minds when they see each flash card. Accept responses from all students who want to give them.
2. Tell the class that they are going to play a similar game in making word associations with Africa.

Procedure:

1. Tell the students that you are going to show them a flash card. They are to write the first word that they think of relating to Africa. Assure the students that there are no right or wrong answers. Use the following words: Africa, animal, land, people, clothing, weather, house, work, leader, color, and communication.
2. Tabulate the responses on the chalkboard and have them discuss their responses.
3. Explain that Africans have different impressions of us also, and it is important to learn the facts.

Follow-up Activities:

1. Discuss stereotypes and how they are formed.
2. Read pages 34 through 37 of The Land and People of Ghana by J. Kirk Sale and have a discussion about these myths.

Evaluation:

Teacher Observation

Bibliography:

The Land and People of Ghana by J. Kirk Sale

Africa and Africans by Paul Bohannon and Philip Curtin

The Africans, An Entry to Cultural History by Basil Davidson

Studying Africa in Elementary and Secondary Schools
by Leonard Kenworthy

THE CONTINENT OF AFRICA

General Objective:

The student will recognize that Africa is a continent of great variety and contrasts.

Background Information:

Africa is a huge continent, almost three times the area of the continental United States. This huge territory can be divided into four climatic areas. Moving from North to South, there is a narrow coastal temperate zone of fertile soil and relatively mild climate, a desert area of sand dunes and very little rainfall, the savanna land of tall grass and scattered trees, and rain forests where grasses and trees are so tall and so thick that in many places the sunlight cannot penetrate.

Specific Objectives:

1. The student will be able to locate the continent of Africa on a map of the world.
2. The student will recognize the size of the continent in relation to the continental United States.
3. The student will learn that Africa can be divided into 4 geographical zones - a coastal temperate zone, the desert area, the savanna grasslands, and rain forests.

Materials:

1. World map
2. Map of Africa
3. Slides showing the ecology of Africa
4. Slide projector
5. Duplicated vegetation maps of Africa (reproduced from pages 87 and 88 of the African Studies Handbook)

Interest Approach:

1. Give the student duplicated copies of topographic and vegetation maps of Africa.
2. Show slides of the ecology of the whole continent.

Procedure:

1. Have the student locate Africa on a World Map and compare it in size to the continental United States.
2. Explain that Africa can be divided into four main geographic regions, and compare these with the geographic regions of the United States.
3. Using the duplicated maps, describe and discuss the main physical features of Africa - elevations, types of vegetation, and climate.
4. Show slides of the ecology of Africa.

Follow-up Activities:

1. The children can take an old map of the world and cut out the United States section and superimpose it on the map of Africa to compare the size of the continent with their own country.
2. Interested students can do extra research in order to compare the types of vegetation found in Ghana with those found in the United States.
3. The children can color the duplicated maps indicating the four geographic zones.

Evaluation:

Teacher made objective test.

Bibliography:

A Glorious Age in Africa. Daniel Chu and Elliott Skinner, Doubleday, N.Y., 1965 (E)

The Land and People of Ghana. J. Kirk Sale, Lippincott, N.Y., 1963. (E)

Africa and Africans. Paul Bohannon and Philip Curtin, Natural History Press, N.Y., 1971.

THE COUNTRY OF GHANA

General Objective:

The student will learn geographic facts and concepts about Ghana.

Specific Objectives:

1. The student will learn the climate and vegetation of the Asante region of Ghana.
2. The student will learn about the natural resources of Ghana.
3. The student will be able to locate Ghana on a map of Africa.
4. The student will be able to make a comparison between the size of Ghana and his/her home state.

Materials:

1. Map depicting the countries of Africa.
2. Transparency of a vegetation map of Africa.
3. Slides showing ecology of Africa.
4. Slide projector.
5. Overhead projector.

Procedure:

1. Have the student locate Ghana on the map of Africa.
2. Using the vegetation map from a previous lesson, have the student discover the types of vegetation in Ghana.
3. Explain that the Akan-speaking peoples live in two of the major climatic and vegetation zones - the forest and savanna grassland, with most areas having an annual rainfall of 30-60 inches. The influence of climate upon human activity can be seen in the fact that most Akans have traditionally been farmers, producing such food crops as yam, plantain, banana, and corn.
4. Review the slides from the previous lesson.

Follow-up Activities:

1. Interested students can do extra research in order to compare the types of vegetation found in Ghana with those found in Arkansas.
2. Compare the size of Ghana with that of Arkansas in terms of area, population, and natural resources.

Evaluation:

Teacher Observation

Bibliography:

A Glorious Age in Africa by Daniel Chu and Elliott Skinner.

The Land and People of Ghana by J. Kirk Sale.

Africa and Africans by Paul Bohannon and Philip Curtin.

Africa In Social Change by P. C. Lloyd.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LIFE

General Objective:

The student will learn to appreciate the culture of the Akan people of Ghana.

Introductory Remarks:

Africa as a continent may seem quite different from America, and it is, but Africans as people will probably strike you as being very similar to yourself. All human beings, after all, face the same needs: to eat, to work, to raise a family, to find entertainment, to get along with others. Learning how Africans manage their lives - sharing their experience - will help you to understand how all people everywhere, including Americans, meet these basic needs.

Specific Objectives:

1. The student will learn that the Akan people live in a strong communal society.
2. The student will understand the matrilineal system of inheritance.
3. The student will realize that many changes are taking place in Ghana as well as other parts of Africa.
4. The student will learn how oral tradition plays an important role in the training and teaching of children.
5. The student will learn that the types of homes of the Akan people depend on the environment in which they live.

Materials:

1. Slides depicting typical family scenes.
2. Selected slides showing traditional and modern homes and other structures.
3. Slide projector.

Procedure:

1. Introduce the slides with background information from the materials in this unit.
2. Show the slides.
3. Stimulate discussion with pertinent questions.

Follow-up Activities:

1. Students can write a report on how Asante family life differs from American family life.
2. Students can go to the library and find books and/or stories to read pertaining to family life in Ghana and report to the class.

Evaluation:

Question - Answer

Bibliography:

The Asante of Ghana by Sonia Bleeker

My Village in Ghana by Sonia and Tim Gidal

Ghana's Heritage of Culture by Kofi Antubam

Africa and Africans by Paul Bohannon and Philip Curtin

The African Genius by Basil Davidson

From Tribe to Town: Problems of Adjustment by Leon E. Clark

Africa In Social Change by P. C. Lloyd

FARMING IN GHANA

General Objective:

The student will understand the importance of the division of labor on a farm.

Specific Objectives:

1. The student will learn that farming is a family project and that each member of the family has a specific responsibility.
2. The student will learn about traditional methods of farming and harvesting.
3. The student will learn that cocoa is the mainstay of Ghana's economy.

Materials:

1. Filmstrip "Cocoa, The Golden Harvest"
2. Filmstrip projector
3. Tape Recorder

Procedures:

1. Explain that Ghana is the world's leading producer of cocoa and that 4 million acres are devoted to the growing of the product.
2. Ask the children why they think Ghana is a rich cocoa producing country?
3. Explain that cocoa needs a warm humid climate with well-distributed rainfall and heavy, well-drained soil.
4. Describe mixed-cropping.
5. Show the filmstrip "Cocoa, the Golden Harvest"

Follow-up Activities:

1. Capable students can write a report on how they think modern technology would change life on Nana Dapaah's farm. Would it help and/or harm the life-style of the people on the farm?
2. Find books and/or stories about Ghana in the library to read and report to the class.
3. Make a comparison between life on a traditional farm in Ghana and life on a farm in Arkansas.

APPRECIATING AFRICAN CULTURES

General Objective:

The student will appreciate the culture of the Akan people of Ghana.

Specific Objective:

The student will gain an understanding of the cultural richness of the Asante as displayed in dress, regalia, art, and ceremony.

Material:

1. Filmstrip entitled "The Golden King"
2. Filmstrip projector
3. Tape recorder
4. Chart illustrating many of the symbolic stools.

Procedure:

1. Display the chart illustrating the symbolic stools.
2. Introduce the filmstrip by explaining the importance of the symbolism of the Golden Stool in the Akan culture.
3. In July 1970, Nana Opoku Ware became the King of the Asante (Asantehene - hene meaning king). The ceremony is called the enstoolment because the most significant royal symbol is the golden stool, just as the British ceremony is called a coronation and centers on the crown as the main symbol of royalty.
4. Explain there is a certain regalia attached to every stool which the king inherits.
5. Have the children make a comparison between the regalia which the king inherits and the regalia which the president of the United States or the governor of Arkansas inherits when he is elected to office.
6. Ask pertinent questions to encourage discussion.

Follow-up Activities:

1. Capable students can simulate newspaper reporters and interview the king after the ceremony. What questions would they ask him?
2. Read the chapter entitled "The Golden Stool" in the book The Asante of Ghana by Sonia Bleeker.
3. Make a study of different kinds of ceremonies and compare them with the ceremony of the "enstoolment" of the king in the filmstrip.

Evaluation:

Teacher observation

Bibliography:

The Asante of Ghana by Sonia Bleeker

The Sacred Stools of the Akan by Peter Sarpong

APPRECIATING AFRICAN CULTURE

General Objective:

- The student will appreciate the culture of the Akan people of Ghana.

Specific Objective:

The student will recognize the artistic value and the social and cultural significance of Asante metalwork.

Material:

1. Filmstrip entitled "The Craftsmen of Kumasi"
2. Filmstrip projector
3. Tape recorder

Procedure:

1. Introduce the filmstrip by telling the students what to look for.
2. Explain that there are thousands of different types of weights that may be classified in five categories:
 - a. Human figures in various actions or holding a variety of objects. These depicted everyday scenes or referred to legends or proverbs.
 - b. Animal figures, many with symbolic meanings--- antelopes, crocodiles, porcupines, birds, fish.
 - c. Objects such as stools, drums, ceremonial swords, etc.
 - d. Geometric designs, some with symbolic meanings.
 - e. Actual objects (seeds, shells, insects, plants) used as molds, rather than wax models.
3. Show the filmstrip.

Follow-up Activities:

1. The children can fashion some models of gold-weights out of clay.
2. The student can look up the meaning of a symbol and explain it to the class.
3. Fashion an animal or symbol that represents the kind of value the students believe in.

Bibliography:

African Crafts by Jane Kerina

Africa's Living Arts by Anthony D. Marshall

The Art of Africa by Shirley Glubok

African Crafts For You To Make by Janet D'Amato

Contemporary African Arts and Crafts by Thelma R. Newman

Africa and Africans by Paul Bohannon and Philip Curtin

APPRECIATING AFRICAN ART FORMS

General Objective:

The student will appreciate African art forms.

Background Information:

In Akan society elaborate funerals and memorial services are held to bid goodbye to the departed. The custom of wearing the colorful print called Adinkra cloth plays an important part in celebrating the memory of the dead. The Adinkra cloth is a very elegant form of dress and is worn for many important occasions.

Specific Objectives:

1. The student will demonstrate that he appreciates the tradition of the Akan of Ghana by making an Adinkra cloth using one of the traditional designs.
2. The student will learn about Akan values and beliefs through the study of Akan culture.

Materials:

1. Newspaper
2. Newsprint or small pieces of cloth
3. Tempora paint
4. Potatoes
5. Clothes line and pins for drying purposes

Interest Approach:

1. Show the students some examples of Adinkra cloth patterns.
2. Explain the traditional usage of the Adinkra cloths.
3. Explain that Adinkra cloths are made and worn by the members of the Akan ethnic groups who live in parts of Central and Southern Ghana.

Procedure:

1. Hand out newspaper for covering desks, potatoes with design already cut, tempora, and newsprint.

Procedure (contd.):

2. Have the student choose a design and color or colors and proceed to make a pattern on newsprint or cloth.
3. A word of caution will be necessary concerning the texture of the paint and how to handle it when they are ready to print the design on paper.

Follow-up Activities:

1. After they are somewhat experienced the interested students can make an Adinkra cloth using a traditional or original design. Plain white cloth or a sheet can serve as a cloth for stamping.
2. The student can model the cloth and explain how it is made to other classes.

Bibliography:

African Crafts by Jane Kerina

Contemporary African Arts and Crafts by Thelma R. Newman

African Crafts For You To Make by Janet and Alex D'Amato

Africa's Living Arts by Anthony Marshall

Africa and Africans by Paul Bohannon and Philip Curtin

Exhibit of African Textiles. World Heritage Museum, Chicago

The Art of Africa by Shirley Glubok

AFRICAN ART: TIE-DYEING

General Objective:

The student will appreciate African art forms.

Background Information:

Tie-dyeing, which has recently become popular in America, is a traditional West African craft. The dye is traditionally obtained from the leaves of the indigo plant. The preparation of the indigo and the dyeing are done by women. Tie-dyeing may have begun as a method of sprucing up old clothes.

The dyeing is traditionally done with vegetable dyes and tying with raffia; now synthetic dyes, a wide variety of colors, and thread are also used. Most of the traditional designs involve intricate stitching of the cloth before dyeing.

Specific Objectives:

1. The student will demonstrate that he appreciates the traditional West African craft of tie-dyeing by participating in the activity and showing his design to other classes or to visitors.
2. The student will tie-dye at least one design.

Materials:

1. One (1) double burner hot plate for each 4 gallon container of water.
2. Clothes line and clothes pins.
3. One (1) four gallon bucket, tub, or basin for every 51 pieces.
4. Buckets, tubs, or basins for rinse water.
5. Spoons or tongs.
6. Scissors.
7. Twine or elastic bands.
8. Dye (3 packets to 4 gallons of water. Purple, royal blue, or scarlet are best.)
9. White or light-colored cotton.

Materials (contd.):

10. Sources of running water.
11. Tie-dyed cloth.
12. Slides of African clothing.

Interest Approach:

1. Show the students some examples of tie-dyed fabric.
2. Explain that tie-dyeing is a traditional craft among some ethnic groups in West Africa.
3. Show slides of tie-dyeing.

Procedure:

1. Hand out small pieces of cloth or paper toweling. Have the student experiment with making different designs. Show them some of the simplest designs, and explain that there are many others.
2. To make all the designs, the binding must be tight and knotted well. Emphasize that the only areas of cloth that will not dye are the areas covered by twine or knotted cloth.
3. For some simple designs see pages 117 - 121 of the African Studies Handbook for Teachers, University of Massachusetts, 1971.

Follow-up Activities:

1. After they are somewhat experienced interested students could bring their own clothing to tie-dye - T-Shirts, blouses, shirts, pillowcases, etc.
2. Have interested students do a research project on other areas of world where tie-dyeing is a traditional craft.
3. Display the finished products of the children and have them explain the art of tie-dyeing to other classes.

Audio-visual Resources:

Slides of African clothing - selected.

Bibliography:

African Designs From Traditional Sources by
Geoffrey Williams

Tie-Dyeing and Batik by F. Anderson

AFRICAN EXPERIENCES

The children will participate in following activities in the course of study about Africa:

Simulation of an African name-giving ceremony.*

Playing of African games, such as oware and blind man's bluff.*

Singing Che-Che-Ku-Le, an African musical game.*

Listening to African folk tales.*

Making at least one musical instrument (rattle) as a class project.

Playing records of African music and learning at least one dance.

*Resource materials on these topics are available through outreach services, African Studies Program, University of Illinois.

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